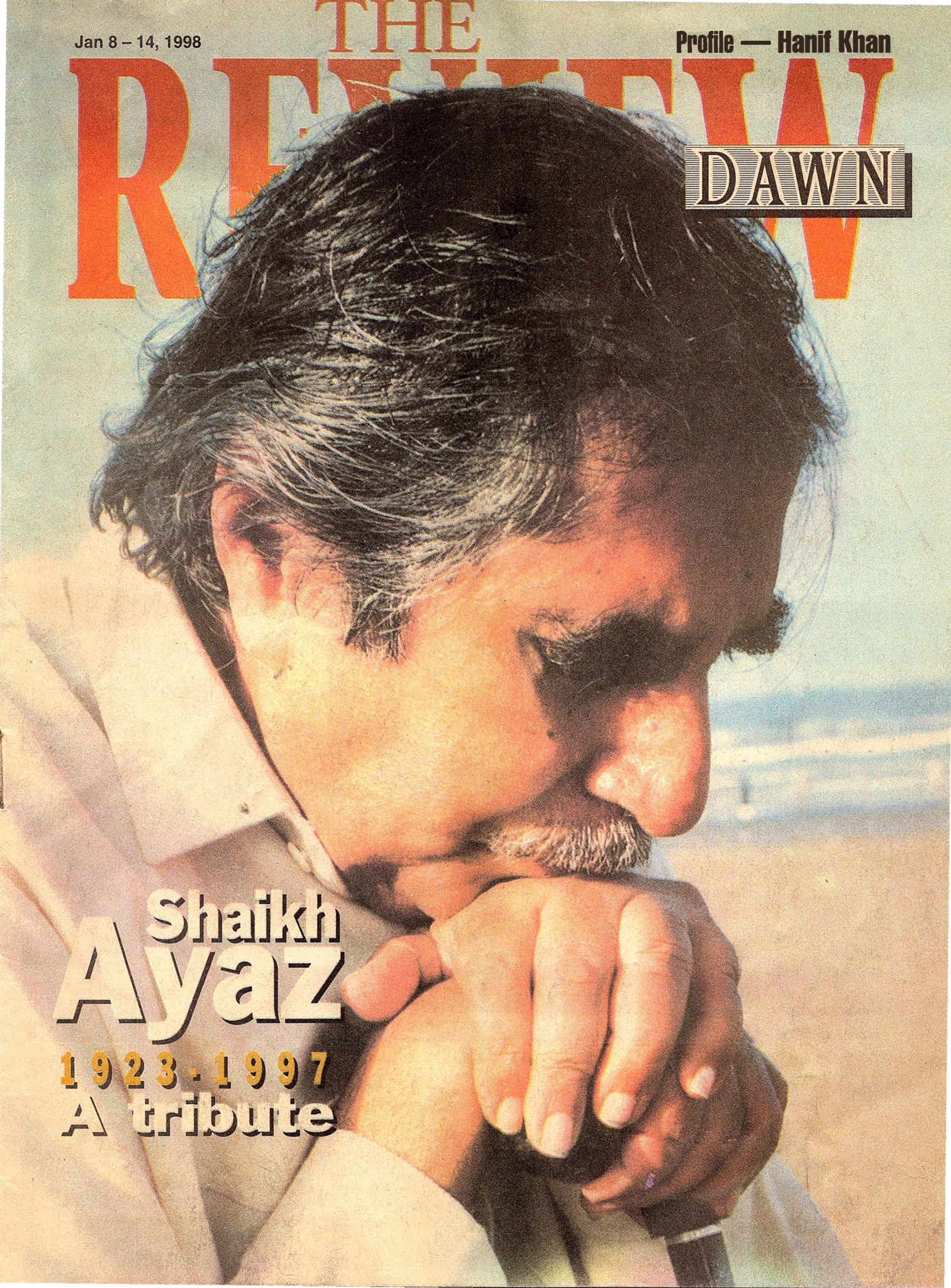


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A tribute



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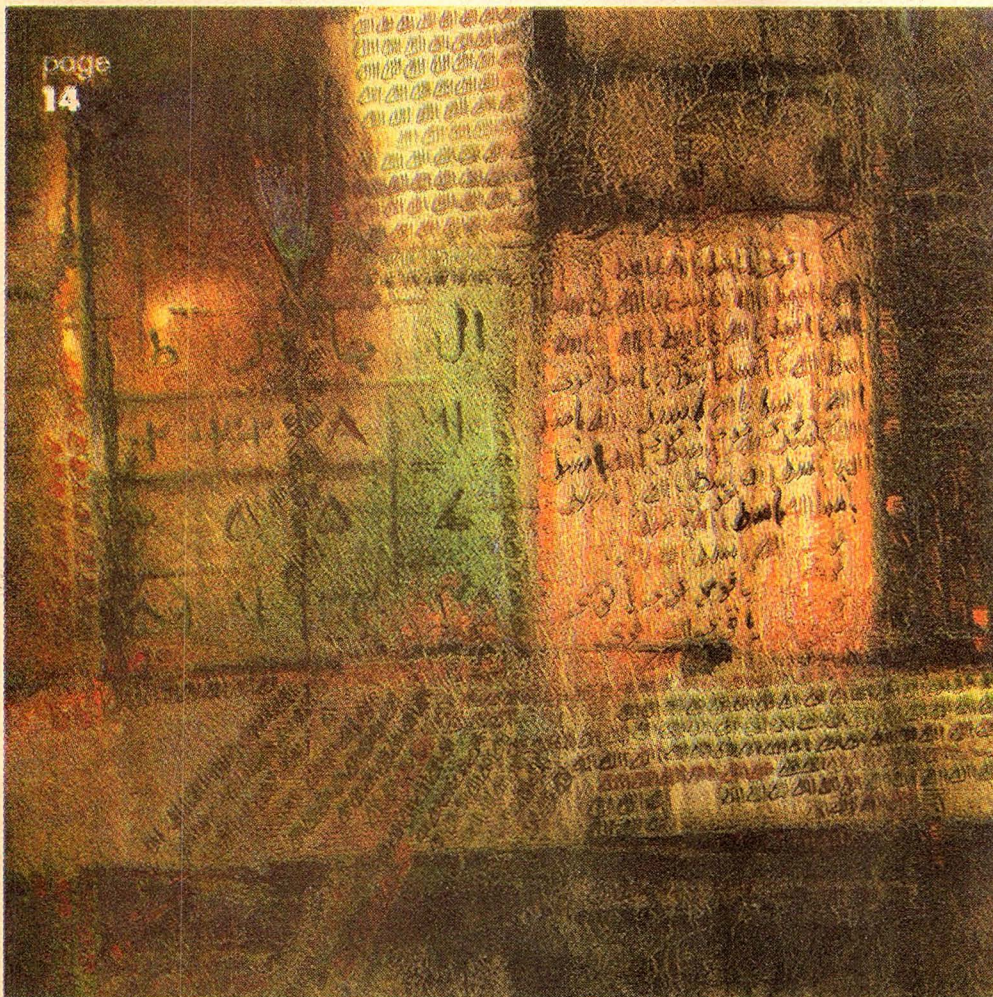
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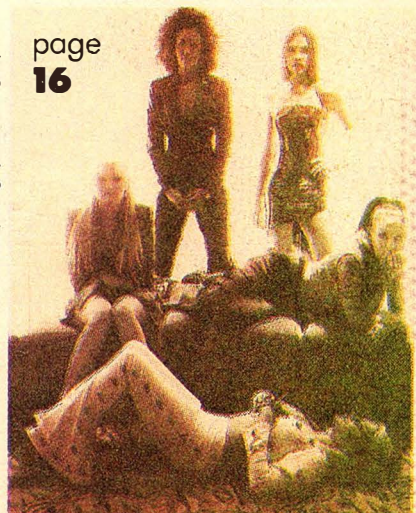
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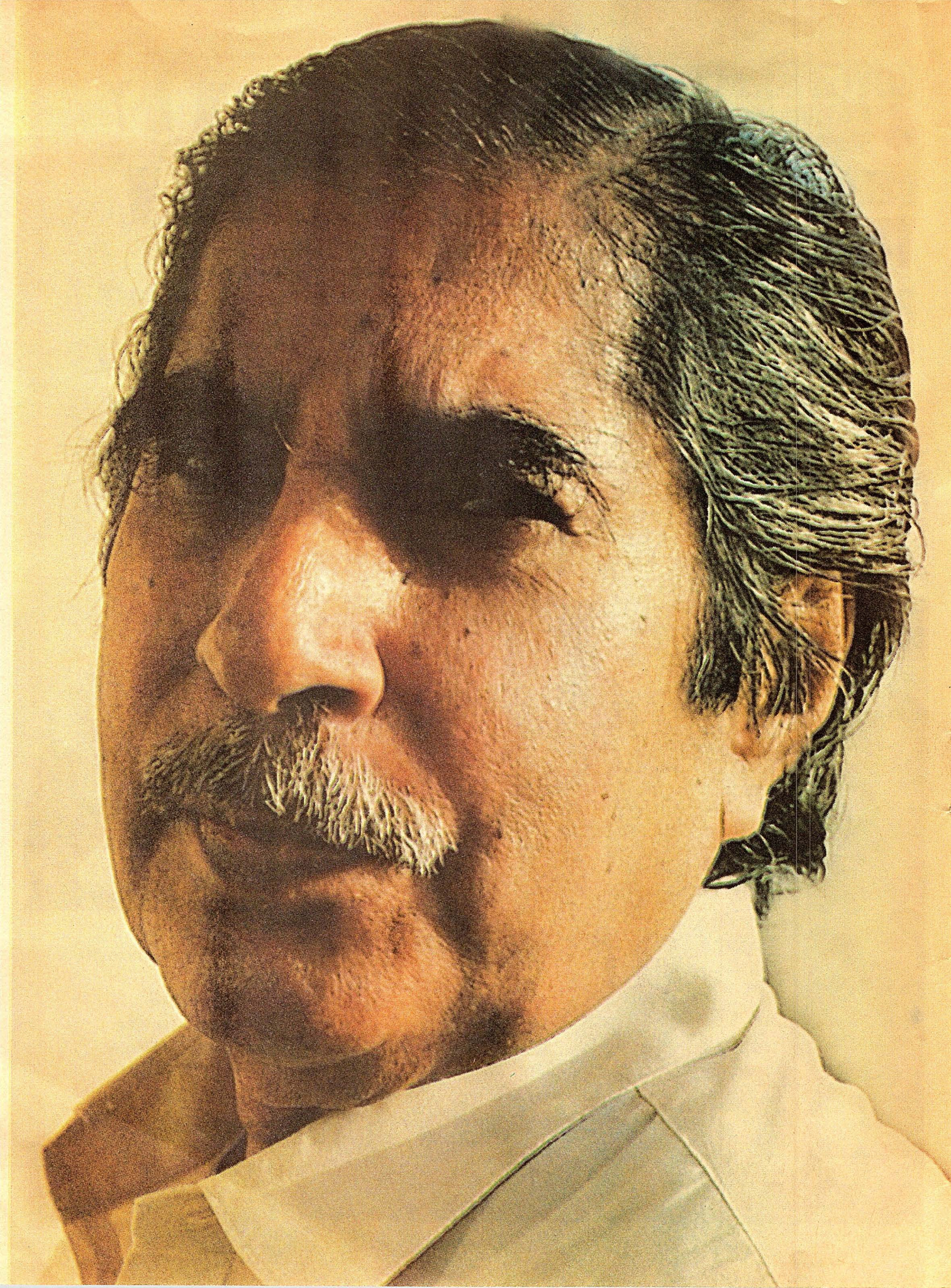
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By Sirajul Haque Memon

In the history of every language some names stand out as the pioneers and leading lights of literature. After Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, Shaikh Ayaz is the next most outstanding and important poet and a literary phenomenon. His contribution to Sindhi literature, both quantitatively as well as qualitatively, stands out as a beacon of excellence and brilliance. His output is simply awe-inspiring. He has to his credit 50 published works of poetry and prose and to the best of my personal knowledge he has left behind three unpublished manuscripts of poems and the third volume of his autobiography.

It is not only the excellence of his diction and form in poetry but also its content. He experimented in almost every genre, both classical and modern. He, in fact, revived the classical forms of doha, dohira, bait, kafi and wa'i, forms which had almost become extinct after Shah Latif and Sachal Sarmast. ➔

S h a i k h A y a z

The man and the poet

Poem

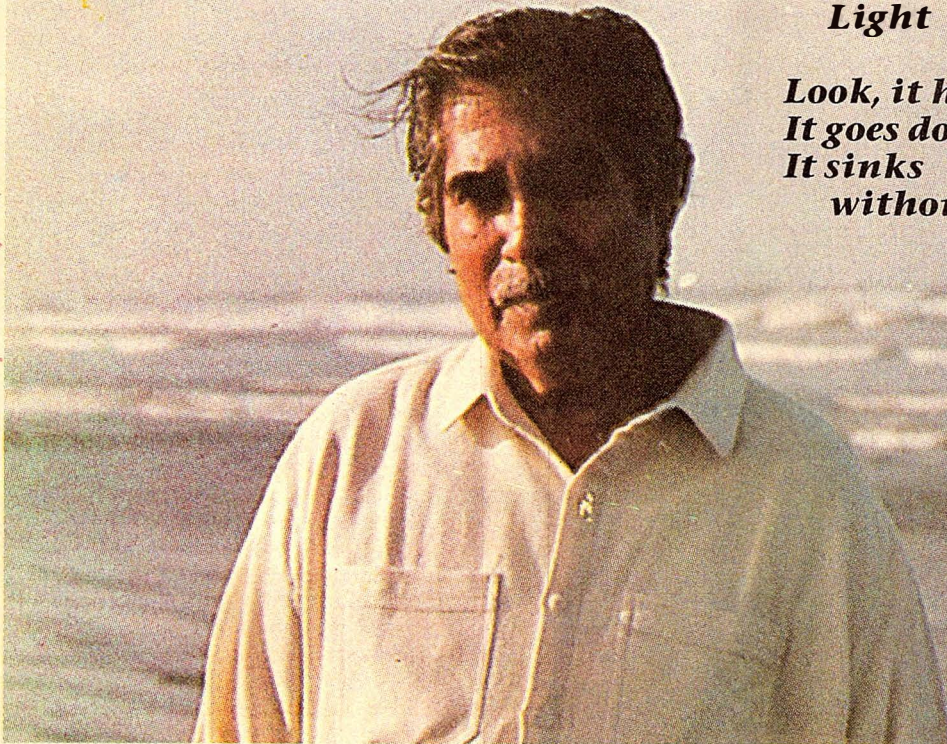
***The sorrows of Sindh are an ocean
Fathomless, impenetrable***

***In the dark waves of the ocean
is tossed my mind***

***And floats
In its own darkness and sorrows***

***Look, it flaps its wings
To call out for
Light***

***Look, it has become weary
It goes down in the deep dark
It sinks
without a trace.***



⇒ These forms have now regained their grandeur and elegance and every major poet of Sindhi language now feels almost a compulsion to follow the path taken by Ayaz. In the modern forms of verse based on meter, he experimented in all the major genres that exist in Persian and Urdu languages. Apart from *ghazal* and *nazm* (including free verse) he also experimented exquisitely in exotic forms like sonnets, haikus and prose poems. Nothing was beyond his reach and he gave a brave new eloquence to every form of art that he practiced.

The greatest achievement of Ayaz was his total mastery over the dialectal subtleties, the inner rhythm and lyrical exuberance of the language. He gave new meaning and content to otherwise quite plain words. He used to tell me that Sindhi language has imbibed five thousand years of varied experiences of culture and civilization and, there-

fore, it had the capability as well as the capacity of expansive expression. Shah Latif Bhitai was his role-model and like him he gave new content and semantic subtleties to ordinary words.

Shaikh Ayaz was one of the most well-versed and well-read persons specially in the field of literature of the east and the west. He had read almost all the great poets of all the major languages of the world. Some he had read in original like the Persian, Urdu and English literature while he read the best of Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali, Greek, Latin, Russian, German French and Spanish literature in translation. It was

**Photographs by K.B.Abro;
English poems of Shaikh Ayaz
translated by Asif Farrukhi and
Shah Mohammad Pirzada**

always a delight to sit with him and listen to his selections from Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Rilke, Lorca, Mayakovsky, Rumi, Hafiz, Quratul Ain, Kalidasa, Vidyapati, Ghalib, Iqbal, Faiz and other major poets of the world. In one of his books in prose, he has recorded his impressions of these great names of world literature.

He has also copiously quoted thought-provoking pieces from the best of the great philosophers, poets and intellectuals of the world in his two volumes of autobiographical sketches. He was conscious of the fact that the great poetry and literature of every language contributed to the collective and civilizational development of the people. Having experienced the delights, the emotional uplifting and cathartic effects of great literature, especially the poetry, he consciously tried to achieve the same greatness and superb sublimity. I can say, without fear of contradiction,



accomplish and as his homeland. But within Pakistan he was a great believer in federalism and the rights of all nationalities on an equal footing. It was in this background that he took up the cause of anti-one-unit movement in Sindh. In the late 50s and early 60s his new poems became almost an anthem in every political gathering for the rights of Sindh and its people. Because of his poems, the anti-one-unit movement gathered such momentum that even politicians like G.M. Syed and Khan Abdul Ghafar Khan, who were in the forefront of the movement were a little wary because the youth of the province were becoming too rebellious.

It was a similar case when he took up the stand in favour of amity, peace and harmony between Pakistan and India because he thought that it was suicidal for the people of both the countries to keep on confronting each other and fighting unnecessary and costly wars. His hymns for peace between Pakistan and India landed him in jail twice. His books were proscribed. The incarceration did not deter him from following the path he had chosen for himself as a writer, as a poet and as an intellectual. He lashed out at the dictatorship of the time and lambasted the efforts made to silence him. In one of his famous poems, which has attained an almost classical stature, he says:

What would you achieve in imposing silence
upon me,
There are thousands of Mansoors who would
continue to defy you!

He was also against the military action in East Pakistan and actively participated in the efforts to solve the problem on the basis of the principles of democracy, mutual understanding and tolerance. Some of his pieces on the East Pakistan tragedy are very moving and agonisingly disturbing.

SHAIKH AYAZ WAS a humanist in the truest sense of the word. Universal brotherhood of mankind was his creed. He was so averse to religious obscurantism, exploitation of the poor and downtrodden that he was castigated by some lobbies as a communist and a heretic. But I know that he was a deeply spiritual individual.

He was a great believer in co-existence and an intimate rapport between Urdu and other national languages of Pakistan. His contribution to Urdu poetry is also of great quality and calibre. His collection of poems *Bui Gul Nalai Dil* and other pieces published in various journals of eminence qualify him as a major poet of Urdu as well. His magnum opus, however, is the translation of *Risalo* of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai into

Urdu verse, which has not only made the message of Shah Abdul Latif — a message of love, compassion and universal brotherhood — accessible to the Urdu-speaking community but also made the Urdu and Sindhi speaking communities living in Sindh come together to understand and share the pathos of Sindh.

He knew most of the luminaries of Urdu literature on a personal level and had been a participant in the Progressive Writers Movement. Later, he was an active member of the Pakistan Writers Guild. Sibte-Hasan, Faiz and Josh were his personal friends. Qudratullah Shahab, Aali, Ahmad Nadeem Qasim and almost all the major writers of Urdu recognized his merit and paid rich tributes to him whenever an occasion arose.

Ayaz was a versatile genius. He was a lawyer by profession. He had a roaring practice in the field of criminal law at Sukkur. He travelled a lot to attend his cases. He came to know the sociological rigidity of the tribal and feudal society in Sindh which resulted in cruelty and violence. He saw cruelty and violence at close quarters and it made him aware of the emotional instability of the people involved in criminal cases. He wrote some fascinating short stories based on true facts and various tribal and feudal customs like *karo kari*. He established a personal rapport with his clients who would then open their hearts to him. He understood their emotional turbulence, their romances, their tribal loyalties overshadowing their compassion and above all the angularities of human relationship. This he used as his raw material for his short stories and autobiographical sketches.


He was appointed as the Vice Chancellor of Sindh University by Z.A. Bhutto. He brought a substantive change in the academic atmosphere of the University and almost compelled the teachers to undertake research in their respective fields of knowledge. He would encourage them to publish their dissertations and lure them to go abroad on scholarships for improving the quality of their academic skills.

After retirement from his profession, he shifted from Sukkur to Karachi. It was during this period of retirement that his output increased. He had a stroke and then a heart attack. He would laughingly say that he had fought the angel of death by showing him the volumes of poetry that are yet to be published.

Sindh, and indeed Pakistan, have lost a great son. He rose like an everlasting meteor on the intellectual and literary horizon. After Faiz Sahib, the death of Ayaz is an irreparable loss for Pakistan. ■

that he did achieve the greatness which he aspired. He became a role model for poets and writers of Sindhi language. His influence on the poets and writers of his own, as well as later generations is over-whelming and far-reaching. Every one in Sindh in the field of literature affectionately referred to him as '*ustad*.'

There is another aspect of Shaikh Ayaz which is equally important and that is the social and philosophical content of his poetry. He was a thoroughbred radical humanist, a socialist in the Fabian tradition and a nationalist in the tradition of all great antagonists of imperialism and colonialism. Before the partition of the subcontinent, he stood by the freedom fighters. His elegy on Dodo in the context of Sindh and of Bhaghat Singh in the context of the subcontinent are among the most moving pieces of that genre of poetry. After partition, he accepted Pakistan as a fait



To eternity where he belongs

COVER STORY

By Asif Farrukhi

Anybody could have died that day. Mercury had already dipped down. Visibility was poor and fog was delaying flights all over the country. One could imagine passengers missing connections and airports crowded with frustration. The sun was an undecided haze outside my window. The sky was overcast and it could have been drizzling in another part of the city. Things looked bleak, cheerless. Just the day for not coming out of bed, I thought.

It was Sunday, the fag-end of a tiring week when for a whole day I could choose to do nothing if I wanted. I switched on the television and then immediately turned it off as it seemed pointless. I reached out to the pile of unread books — my secret source of delight and anticipated pleasures that I keep besides my bed and randomly picked from the pile. It was the much thumbed and dog-eared volume of W.H. Auden's love poems, *Tell Me the Truth About Love*. I

opened the slender book around the middle and started reading the first poem that I saw, *At Last the Secret is Out*, but then gave it up. Not a nice poem to recite in the post-AIDS world. I turned three or four pages at once and came to another poem which I very much like, the one called *Funeral Blues* (read out so poignantly in the movie *Four Weddings and a Funeral*). I read a few lines and then stopped out of superstition. There is always a flurry of deaths in December and January, as if Somebody Up There wants to close accounts. I picked out the new pocket edition of *Diwan-e-Ghalib* published two days ago to mark two hundred years of the poet's birth, thinking that I will present it and the new translation of Ghalib's Persian *ghazals* to Shaikh Ayaz and be rewarded with the rare treat of hearing him talk of Ghalib. It was then the telephone rang. Just as it does in melodramatic movies and Urdu novels. (But may be life's like that on Karachi's

much too mild winter days). It was a voice I knew and the news was as dismal as the Karachi winter day. Shaikh Ayaz chose such a day for his death. I immediately reached out for the poem that I had left in the middle and read on:

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dogs from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves...

No, he was not my North, my South, my East and West. Neither my working week nor my Sunday rest (how I wish otherwise now!). But "I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong." My mind was too numb to think of

anything else. It was when I went to the poet's home and sat down with the writers gathered there that it hit me with the brutal force of a shock wave: Shaikh Ayaz is no more. I sat down on a *durrie* spread out in the car park in the high-rise building where the poet made his home and watched a host of people come and go. Death seemed such a public affair. But this was the evil of the triumph of death.

Death is a fierce horse-rider in a Shaikh Ayaz poem. It does not stop for pomegranate buds and strikes swiftly. Death was no stranger to the poet. It knocked on his door many times and each time was sent away empty-handed. Poet Attiya Dawood recalled that after one of the many heart attacks that he had, he remarked that "I have won this round from the angel of death but someday he is going to finally pull me down." This sense of being interlocked in close battle, or even a *malakhra* with death was replaced with the acceptance

of death as an inevitable reality in his last days. He talked many times of the approaching end as something just round the corner. Sometimes he gave the impression that he was waiting for the shadow of death to approach so that he can savour one more poetic experience, something which he has missed out so far. Sitting in his drawing room, rolling a cigarette which he could not light but still wanted to keep between his fingers to satisfy an age-old habit, reciting poetry and talking about whatever he fancied at the moment, he would touch upon death as a theme, a subject. But he was also concerned about all that he had to do before the final sleep. "When the angel of death comes knocking, I will ask him to help me with some proof-reading before I am ready to leave," he said to me in what turned out to be our last meeting.

More than death, he talked about the books that he was very keen to see in print. Crossing the boundaries of life and death, he would talk about his unfinished business with poetry, his life-force which he was not willing to let go. He had just completed reading the proofs of the third volume of his memoirs which covered his years as a lawyer in Sukkur and had completed the first draft of the fourth volume. This was in addition to the ceaseless stream of poetry that bubbled and poured out of him. "I have written through last night," he would tell me time and again. He would say and smile like the earth which had been soaked in rain all night.

The spirit of poetry moved bright and sparkling in him. Publishers and editors could not keep pace with him and he often complained about this. Probably he could sense that time was running out and this is what sometimes made him impatient with me. He was very interested in the translations of modern Sindhi poems with which I have been struggling for the last three years, which included a number of his poems. He was keen that the book appears in print and had even promised

to write an introduction to make the book more attractive to the prospective publisher.

Even if it makes it into print, any such book will now remain unfinished for me. In my last telephone conversation with him, he talked about a novel which he had once started on the life of Shah Abdul Latif but abandoned after two chapters. "Why are you interested in an unfinished novel?" he had asked. But then agreed to have the fragment translated into Urdu. He also liked the idea of having a one-volume selection from his autobiographical books. A collected edition of his short stories was also in the pipeline. "My autobiography will run into at least 10 volumes," he had said. "I am not following a chronological order but writing just as I recall things." Till his very last days, he was full of books and literary ideas and he died when he could no longer write. Cardiac failure, the doctors pronounced.

Poetry was the life-blood of that master-spirit. I mourn my personal loss, but the life in poetry which is the legacy of Shaikh Ayaz is not to be lamented but celebrated. Beyond doubt the greatest living poet in any language of Pakistan, Shaikh Ayaz was for me a cultural hero. Three distinct traditions had their confluence in his poetry. He was equally at home in the songs of Thar, the folk poetry going back to the oral tradition just as he was familiar with the poetic traditions of the West, being conversant with T.S. Eliot, Pablo Neruda and Lorca. He was also steeped in the Persian and Urdu classics, speaking to Ghalib as a kindred spirit (death has linked him once again with Ghalib as their anniversaries will appear together).

These three traditions fused together to give the poetry of Shaikh Ayaz its unique character and it is because of this character that the twentieth century in Sindhi literature will be known as the age of Shaikh Ayaz. He was firmly rooted in his land and did not have to carve out an artificial identity like the *Indus Man* of

An excerpt from the translation of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai's *Shah Jo Risalo* by Shaikh Ayaz in Urdu

چوتھی داستان

جستجوئے جمالِ ہستی میں
اے سسئی اس جہان فانی کی
جستجوئے نجات میں حائل
وصلِ جانان کی ایک ساعت بھی
اک ثبوتِ ثبات اپنے پاس
ذکر پنہوں کی جستجو کا ہے
اس طرف وہ نظر نہیں ہوتی
جان نثارانِ حسنِ جانان پر
دیدہ و دل کی منزلِ آخر

*

اے سسئی! آن کی پیروی کرنا
کیا ہے دو روزہ زندگی کا بھرم

*

موت سے پہلے جس کو موت آئی
مدعاے حیات کیا کہیے
جہان نثارانِ جلوہٴ جانان

*

زندگی اک فریبِ کثرت ہے
نام کے عزمِ کوہِ پیمانی
اے اجل تو پناہ دے مجھ کو

*

اے سسئی ہست ہمتی تیری
پیارے پنہوں کو کر دیا بدنام
دُرگئی سوزِ عشق سے نادان

Aitaz Ahsan. He did not have to spurn or ridicule one tradition to be accepted by the other. The state of our culture being what it is, it is hard to imagine that there will be another poet who will be so well-versed and fluent in the Indo-Persian tradition now. Even in Urdu poets, one no longer finds the kind of familiarity with the classics which Shaikh Ayaz had. He was a titan who stood astride languages, traditions and epochs. This is the time of narrow, parochial pygmy poets. With Shaikh Ayaz ends the twilight of the gods.

Thinking of him made me yearn for the sea. I got up and went to walk down Clifton Beach. The sea was cold, shimmering in the distance, the rhythm of its waves as

passionate and timeless as Shaikh Ayaz's poetry. *Chaholion bolion samand joon* was the title of one of his books, the one collection which perhaps best displays his virtuosity. The beach was almost deserted. The sun was sinking on the horizon, I wanted to kneel down on the beach opposite the Oyster Rock and proclaim to the world: He Is No More! He has left us and gone to the eternity where he belongs. Shaikh Ayaz was an uncrowned king of the world of letters. The tribute he deserves is one befitting a king: Shaikh Ayaz is dead. Long live Shaikh Ayaz! But I did not proclaim this. I sat down and wrote my adieu and last salute to him on the sand by the sea. Thank heavens for the sea. ■

COVER STORY

By Amar Jaleel

In letter and spirit

Like all great poets, writers, scholars and intellectuals Shaikh Ayaz was at times misunderstood, misinterpreted and misjudged not only by his die hard adversaries, but by his admirers as well. Intrinsic meaning in his poetry and prose had an aura of profundity and always surpassed the apparent meaning of the words he used in his compositions. Surrounded by controversies and shrouded in mysteries, Shaikh Ayaz was an enigma. More than thirty years before he embarked upon his eternal journey into the unknown on Sunday, 28 December, 1997 he had become a legend in his lifetime. He then had produced remarkable literature of resistance to wage a gruelling war against the dictator Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan. In the final analysis his pen proved mightier than the sword. Thereafter, the world saw the emergence of a totally different Sindh imbued with defiance:

How many voices shall thou silence,
oh dictator!
I am not alone, but many.

For some Shaikh Ayaz was a saint, and for others a sinner; for some he was a believer and for others he was a non-believer; for some he was a patriot and for others he was a traitor; for some he was a mystic and for others he was an atheist. He was always vehemently and

emotionally debated and discussed. You may like him, or you may not, but to ignore him was inconceivable.

To understand Shaikh Ayaz is to first understand his thought process and consciousness. An enormous vocabulary does not turn a poet into a great poet. It is something else that elevates a person from the ordinary to the realms of reverence. A highly receptive sensibility, penetrative perception and persuasive eagerness to understand the ethos of the political, social, cultural and economic conflicts in proximity transform a poet into a great poet, and a writer into a great writer of his time. A poet of paramount prominence must pronounce his

opinion with convictions:

Perceive the pearls he carries,
Do not pelt him with stones,
For the minstrel will not return.

The partition of India had a traumatic bearing on the prose and poetry of Shaikh Ayaz. Enduring pathos became a hallmark in his expression. He became the poet of suffering humanity and arose above petty politics. He was not concerned with the creation or disintegration of a country, but what plunged him in unbearable agony and pain was the division and separation of people, separation of friends and loved ones. To give vent to his feelings, Ayaz drowned in anguish and wrote profusely. Never before had Sindhi literature experienced such volcanic force steeped in tragedy.

Stranded in a battle field,
In front of Narayan Sham,
How am I to kill him!

(Narayan Sham was a childhood friend of Ayaz, and a remarkable poet, and had migrated to India after partition. He passed away a few years ago).

Thus, Shaikh Ayaz was hounded by those who are infested with a perverse desire to sit in judgment on other people's conscience and consciousness. For

Poem

*Is the Sur Rano
dust?
Is the Kohyari
dust?*

*I ask of Bhittai
All of the Bhit is dust.*

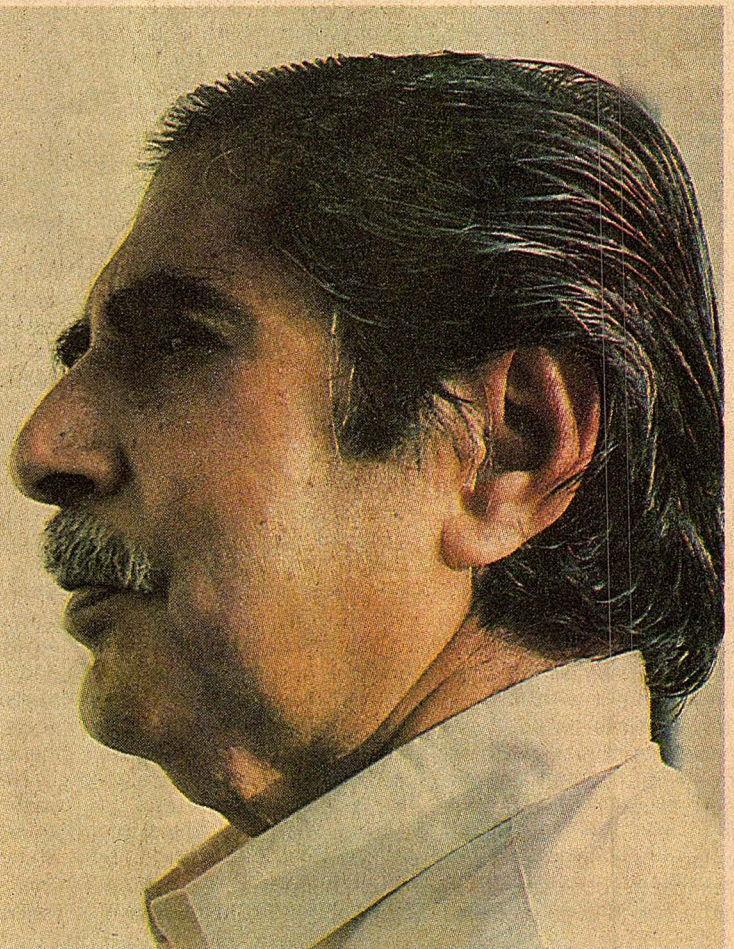
*Everyone who suffers pain is
dust,
Then why did not everybody
See the setting sun like Sassi?*

*(Was it the same sun after Punhoon
or a gaping wound?)*

*The lamp's element is
dust
But the flickering flame
is not dust
The vision which transports
is not dust.*

*The stars are dust
But their twinkling is not*

*The light which trickles down on you
from the distance
Is not dust.*



undemocratic and sick minds Ayaz was a traitor; he was incarcerated.

The One Unit, sinister and political fiends in the history of Pakistan (1956-68) left a deep and everlasting impact on the soul of Shaikh Ayaz. He was not prepared to accept Sindh as *sabiq*, (former) Sindh; for Shaikh Ayaz, Sindh was a living entity; Sindh could not become *sabiq* under any pretext. And then, an anthem for a living and vibrant Sindh echoed throughout the region:

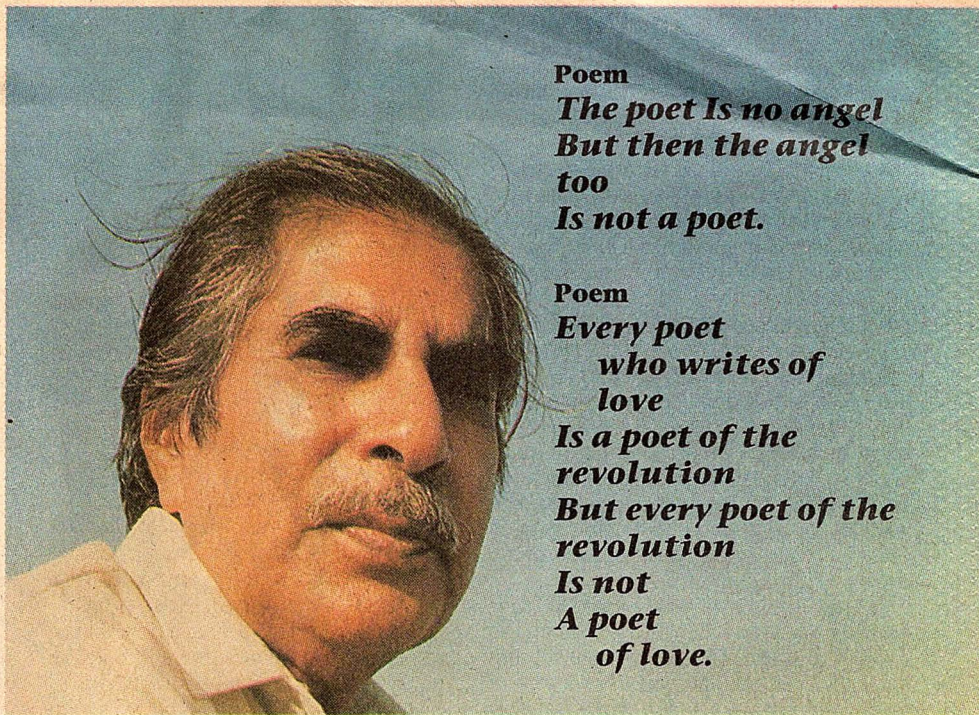
Oh land of the country called Sindh,
Revered, I bow before thee,
And, adore my forehead
with thy soil.

Vicious campaigns of slur and hatred were unleashed against Ayaz. He was censured for arousing separatist tendencies among the youth of Sindh. He was incriminated for infusing a movement for Sindhudesh, and revolt against the federation. He was accused of farming hatred against the State and was charged with sedition. By then, Shaikh Ayaz had become a household name in Sindh.

By temperament Shaikh Ayaz was anti-authoritarian. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto did not want to pick trouble with Shaikh Ayaz, and he became instrumental in his appointment as Vice Chancellor of Sindh University. Ayaz was not an educationist. By no stretch of imagination was he an administrator. He was genuinely and naturally inclined as a poet and had digested the classical literature of English, Sindhi, Urdu, Hindi, and Persian languages. Soon he entered into disagreement with the students and the University teachers. The years Ayaz spent at the University tarnished his image. He came lonely, sad, and forlorn and went into oblivion for sometime.

And thus commenced the final phase in the turbulent life of the great poet. There was something strange, inexplicable about Shaikh Ayaz. He composed poetry in the modern times, but in his diction he had established a spiritual link with Kabir, Kalidas, Rumi, Milton, Keats, Farid, Bulhay Shah, Sachal Sarmast, and Shah Latif Bhattai. One often wonders whether he was their disciple who had put on a mysterious cloak and had surmounted the phenomenon of timelessness to be with us! I do not know.

Those of us who claim to have known Ayaz intimately, in fact do not know him. After Shah Latif Bhittai, Shaikh Ayaz was bestowed with enormous vocabulary to express the complexities of life in multiple forms with effortless ease and simplicity in his expressions. And, after Sachal Sarmast, Mansoor Hallaj of Sindh, Shaikh Ayaz was the bold, brave, and fearless poet who during the closing years of his life wrote of direct communion with his Creator.... the true essence of a mystic *sufi*! ■



Poem

***The poet Is no angel
But then the angel
too
Is not a poet.***

Poem

***Every poet
who writes of
love
Is a poet of the
revolution
But every poet of the
revolution
Is not
A poet
of love.***

COVER STORY

By Attiya Dawood and translated by Asif Farrukhi

The last salute

When Shaikh Ayaz suffered a heart attack for the third time, he remarked to a newspaper reporter, "I have won this round from death but I know that the final victory belongs to death." Abro and myself had gone to see him in the hospital. Abro had painted a card which we presented him with flowers. I wrote on the card that "Shaikh Ayaz is our consciousness and consciousness cannot be defeated by death."

Ayaz's family members say that for the last three years his friends had left him all by himself. He would have his eyes to the door and keep waiting for friends to call him on the telephone. Ayaz's friends and admirers knew that in spite of poor health, he was constantly writing and that there were a number of books that he wanted to complete so that there was little time that he could get for some rest. He would not follow the instructions from his doctors for taking rest. His son Dr Saleem knew that rest was important for him but when he saw that the light in Shaikh Ayaz's room was on till late night, he and other family members would come and plead with him to get some sleep. Then Ayaz thought of another way to keep on writing without letting his family know. He went out for a walk and bought a number of registers and exercise books. He

would put off the light in his room and in the darkness write two or three lines on the register. By daybreak, he would have a number of registers filled with his latest writing.

His wife Zarina told me, "All my life I never demanded time from him for myself or my children. I took over the responsibilities of the children and the household so that he could get sufficient time for his writing and literary work. His life and his happiness was in this work. But in his last years I would repeatedly tell him that he needed more rest because he was not well. He would then tell me that, 'Zarina, just let me finish this book then I will rest for a few days.' But I knew that his writing never ended and after completing one book, he would start another one. In his last days, he used to say to me that 'Zarina, pray for me that I am able to complete this book that I am working on.' But this could not be. Death did not give him sufficient time. He left behind that book and a number of incomplete manuscripts."

In Sindh there is a small group of writers who constantly attacked Ayaz and wrote against him. There were some who were waiting for his death so that they could proclaim themselves as leading poets of the time. Ayaz was widely appreciated and at the same time, he was severely criticized. Some time he was un-necessarily attacked.

But his poetry won the love of people as no other writer.

On December 28, 1997 Sindhi Adabi Sangat was celebrating its Golden Jubilee in the Sindh Museum Hall, Hyderabad. Writers and literati from all of Sindh were to gather there. Early in the morning, the news of Ayaz's death reached there. Those who were coming into the hall to attend the function would receive the news of his death and burst into tears. There were nearly 500 people inside the hall. The Golden Jubilee programme turned into a condolence meeting. This was the first time such a thing had happened that after the death of a writer, even before the dead body could reach his home from the hospital in Karachi, such a large number of writers had gathered in another city to pay homage to the departed soul. All the people gathered in the hall were loudly lamenting and embracing each other in grief. There were tears in every eye.

It was in such a mood that the programme started. Ibrahim Joyo, Hameed Akhund and Hameed Sindhi sent a message that we are with you in this time of sorrow but we are trying to make arrangements for his burial. Then we received the message that it was through their efforts that arrangements have been made for burial in Bhit Shah in accordance with Shaikh Ayaz's will. Dr Tanveer Abbasi also shared a few words with the audience and left to help with the arrangements of the burial. It was very difficult to say anything. Even the newspaper reporters and photographers who were collecting people's impressions were finding it difficult and trembling with emotions. Zarina Baloch started singing Ayaz's poetry and the entire hall began to mourn and lament. From the morning to evening, people kept crying and wailing. The programme was not running according to any prepared schedule. Even when people were called for lunch arranged by the Sangat, many were still crying and sobbing.

The next day writers started arriving at Bhit Shah from early morning. The site for the burial was selected close to the Bhit Shah rest house next to the Karar lake, in a clump of green leafy trees. This was made possible by the efforts of Hameed Akhund, Secretary Culture. When the dead body was being brought, more than 200 writers stood in a row with flower petals in their hands and waited for the dead body to arrive. At that time, another dead body was brought for burial. There were 50 or 60 people. I had never been part of a burial ceremony in my entire life and had seen coffins only from a distance. Now I could see people who had become a part of the whole process only for *sawab* or for the sake of sympathy with the deceased's family. But when Ayaz's dead body was brought, people were reciting his poems, reading, singing, crying and sobbing loudly. It was with tears, sobs and flower petals that they saluted their favourite writer. I stood in the compound of Shah Latif's tomb and could not control my tears. There was an old woman standing there who came near and

tried to comfort me. She asked me if it was my father's dead body which was being brought there. I told her that even if it had been my father, I would not have cried like this. The woman was surprised and wanted to know who it was since so many people were mourning for him and what relationship could he have with so many people? I asked her what relationship did Shah Latif have with all of us. The woman said that now she understood and it must have been some very important personality that has passed away. She said this and started crying in sympathy with me.

All of us who were gathered there were severely affected by grief. Senior writers like Ibrahim Joyo, Tanveer Abbasi, Hameed Sindhi, Ghulam Rabbani Agro and Zafar Kazmi were doing their best to comfort and console us. They would fetch water and get plates of food, just like elders in the family at the time of a calamity. For the first time I felt that in addition to literature, there was another bond between us writers, a very human one.

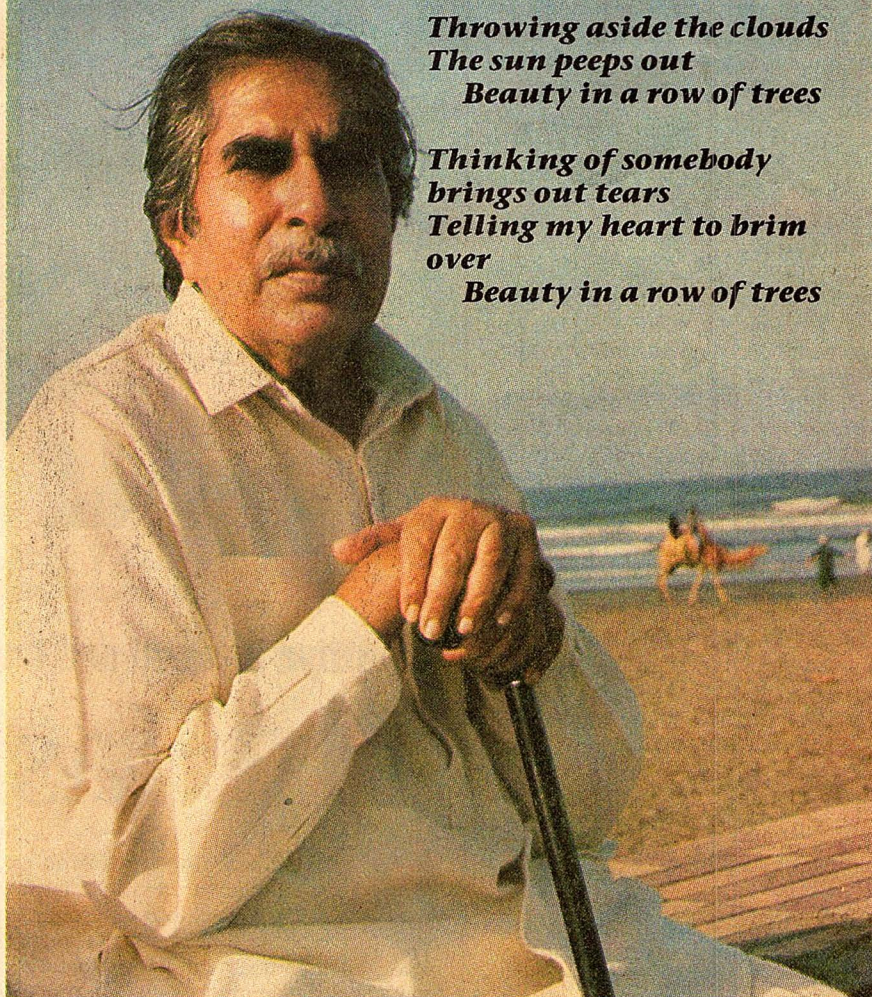
Writers are the true heirs of Shaikh Ayaz and they were performing his last

Wa'i: landscape and rainbow

**Where the rainbow ends
Look at the kikar over there
Beauty in a row of trees**

**Throwing aside the clouds
The sun peeps out
Beauty in a row of trees**

**Thinking of somebody
brings out tears
Telling my heart to brim
over
Beauty in a row of trees**



rites. And after his burial, a number of writers were reciting his poetry. Afterwards, Bedil Masroor and Sadiq Faqir sang his verses. I had quoted the example of Bhattai to the old woman, but the people who come to Bhattai's tomb include a large number of those for whom he is nothing else but a *murshid*, one who fulfils hopes and prayers, a saint. But the writers who had gathered there knew that Ayaz belonged to us. Some were saying that we are unfortunate that we saw the death of Shaikh Ayaz but we are lucky to have been born in his era. Names such as Bhattai and Shaikh Ayaz are not born in every age but only once in a while. Nobody could take the place of Bhattai, not even after so many centuries. Similarly, nobody will be able to take the place of Ayaz. This is something which the coming centuries will not be able to change. We have seen and witnessed the burial of Shaikh Ayaz with our own eyes and there is a tombstone at Bhit Shah to confirm that Shaikh Ayaz is no more but we feel that Shaikh Ayaz cannot die as long as the world itself lives. ■